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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: Priority Theme: Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies

Statement submitted by VIVAT International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Statement submitted by VIVAT International, a Non-Governmental Organization in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations working in 127 countries in the world.

Introduction

Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals by 193 countries of the United Nations General Assembly on September 25th, 2015, efforts have been made by all stakeholders to implement and make this development agenda come true for all people and the planet. The motto "Leave no one behind" seems to be powerful enough to push everyone forward. A lot of progress has been made during these past three years, as reported and shared through voluntary national reviews (VNRs) at High Level Political Forum sessions since 2016. The UN Report of 2018 also gives us the hope that, by 2030, this Agenda will work in every country and region (See: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2018).

However, gaps remain and many are still being left behind. People in rural and suburban slum areas, people with HIV/AIDS, persons with disabilities and persons with mental health problems are the most vulnerable ones to be uncounted in the development process.

Inequalities and Challenges

People in rural and suburban slum areas tend to be ignored and neglected in government programs and have less access to public services such as health care, free basic education, electricity and public transportation, safe drinking water and sanitation. Many people in rural areas are also excluded from government statistics which results in being excluded from access to social benefits. In some countries, multinational corporations and governments have grabbed the lands and territories of the people in rural areas for mining, plantations, or electric dams, without any compensation; this situation has resulted in the increase in poverty, unemployment and food insecurity. Finally, children of poor families in rural and suburban slums areas are often vulnerable by being victims of cheap labor, human trafficking and sexual exploitation, and violence.

Persons with disabilities, persons with HIV/AIDS and persons with mental health disabilities are among those most maltreated in society. They are face obstacles to education, health care, access to public services, and social protection. These peoples' voices also tend to be ignored; their participation and contribution in political, economic and socio-cultural affairs and development process are not recognized in many societies. In some societies, such persons are labeled and stigmatized as a burden for their families and society as a whole. It is often found that persons with disabilities are underpaid and discriminated against from access to certain jobs and prestigious positions in their work places which then results in extreme poverty and vulnerability among these people and a potential violation of their basic human rights (https://workspirited.com/discrimination-against-disabled-people-in-workplace).

VIVAT International's Efforts and Commitment

In response to the situation previously described and in relation to people in rural and suburban slum areas, VIVAT International has taken some initiatives to ensure food security by providing and distributing food for the poor in suburban and rural areas. In Kayole, suburban Nairobi, for example, a "food for the poor" program has been developed to feed the poor from 6 to 98 years old living in slums – Soweto,

Matopeni, Spring Valley and Gatwikira — most of whom are street children and elderly. They also receive medical services (See Anthony Amissah, "The Power of Food", VIVAT Newsletter, 75th, April–June, 2018:4-5).

Similarly, the Divine Word Missionaries which is a founding Congregation of VIVAT International has developed the "Arnold Project" for vulnerable people in rural and suburban areas of Ecuador. This project operates in three parishes outside Guayaquil City: St. Arnold Janssen in Mount Sinai, Our Lady of the Rocks, and St. Brother Michael in Guasmo. The aim of this project is to assist families and children in risky and violent situations. More than 270,000 inhabitants live in this vast area. Seventy-five percent of this population lives in abject poverty. They migrated from Chimborazo, Azuay and Manabi provinces and live in small houses made of wood and reeds and built on the extensions of land acquired from land traffickers. It is common to find more than one family living in one house or many single mothers with their children. Unemployment is rampant. The project also provides food and free counseling for these people (John Cudjoe, SVD, "The Arnold Project: Hope for the Vulnerable in Guayaquil, Ecuador", in Divine Word Missionaries Magazine, Winter 2017:10-12).

In Nong Bhua Lampu, Northeast Thailand, VIVAT International members run a Rehabilitation Center called "Mother of Perpetual Help Center" for HIV/AIDS patients. Established 16 years ago, this center tries to give hope to patients who are mostly neglected and rejected by their families. At the Mother of Perpetual Help Center patients receive intensive medical care as well as HIV/AIDS education program ("HIV/AIDS Challenge 2018 Thailand" in Divine Word Missionaries, Summer 2018: 6 - 11). Similarly, in Vitoria City, Brazil, VIVAT International (Divine Word Missionaries) founded a center called Villa de Nazare (House of Nazareth) in 1993 for HIV/AIDS patients, especially for children and teenagers. These children receive medical treatment as well as education program (Markus Fraedrich, "Villa de Nazare: HIV/AIDS Challenge 2018 Brazil," in Divine Word Missionaries, Summer 2018:12–16).

In both countries, poverty and lack of education are two of the root causes of HIV/AIDS. Therefore, education and eradication of poverty have been part of VIVAT International's effort and commitment to free these people from being marginalized, excluded and discriminated against.

Sustainable Development Goals and Social Protection

The Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, are a 15 year development agenda by all and for all. In relation to eradication of poverty, Goal 1, target 1.3, calls for governments to implement nationally and locally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors. It also calls for the achievement of a substantial coverage of the poor both in rural, suburban, and rural areas and the vulnerable, including the persons with disabilities, persons with HIV/AIDS, migrant workers and persons with mental health problems.

Meanwhile, Goal number 1, target 1.4, calls for the governments to ensure that all people, especially the poor and the vulnerable, have access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, natural resources and inheritance.

All of these are based on the 6 essential elements: dignity, people, prosperity, our planet, justice, and partnership.

Recommendations:

Based on those realities, challenges and expectations, VIVAT International calls upon Member States to:

1. Provide fiscal policies that include the fulfillment and the protection of the rights of the suburban and rural people to food, education, health ca.e, electricity, water and sanitation, and public transportation/infrastructure.

2. Provide fiscal policies for the medical care and health education of persons with HIV/AIDS;

3. Provide fiscal policies that guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities and persons with mental health problems to have access to facilities and public services.

4. Establish national minimum wage policies that ensure the fulfillment of the basic needs (housing, food, clothing, education, health and recreation) of rural and suburban people.

5. Ensure and enact laws and policies that protect and respect persons with disabilities from discrimination, abuse and exploitation.

6. Create more job opportunities for the persons with disabilities.

7. Provide insurance policies that include the suburban, rural, migrant workers, persons with disabilities, persons with HIV/AIDS, and persons with mental health problems.

Conclusion

The dignity of all, including the poor in suburban and rural areas, migrant workers, persons with disabilities, persons with HIV/AIDS, persons with mental health disabilities, can be achieved and fulfilled if all stakeholders commit themselves to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals for the benefit of all. With its motto, "Together for Life, Dignity and Human Rights," VIVAT International, along with the United Nations and in collaboration and partnership with multi-stake holders, continues to put the last first, to bring the marginalized at the center of its work and to become the voice of the voiceless both at national and global levels.